



# **The Pringle Memorial Home**

**1899-1957**

**Source of the  
Thomas Pringle Memorials in  
The New York Community Trust  
909 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10022**

*In 1957, the Thomas Pringle Memorials were established, to be administered by the New York Community Trust and to support programs similar to those originally provided by the Pringle Memorial Home.*

A man who has devoted his life to honest hard work deserves to spend his retirement years in dignity and comfort. It was belief in this philosophy that led Margaret Pringle Fenton and her brother, Samuel M. Pringle, to provide for the establishment of the Pringle Memorial Home for aged men, in memory of their father. When such an institution was no longer a practical expression of that belief, the Thomas Pringle Memorials were founded to continue carrying out their wishes.

Margaret, Samuel, and another brother, Mulligan, were born in New York City in the early nineteenth century, the children of Thomas Pringle. Their mother had been a Mulligan. It was a close-knit family of Scotch-Irish background. Although only a few family anecdotes survive to describe the Pringles, it is apparent that family ties were very strong.

As a young woman, Margaret was married to David W. Fenton of New York. The couple had no children. The inheritance Margaret received from her father enabled the Fentons to live comfortably on a quiet street in the Greenwich Village section of Manhattan. They were people who read a great deal and who were in-

terested in music. They counted a number of musicians among their friends, and musical evenings in their home were frequent events.

Margaret Fenton was thought to be a rather eccentric woman. She was frugal to an exceptional degree, always keeping the food in the house under lock and key. After each meal she doled out a ration of bread and other food for the household help, then locked away what remained. Family members have recalled visiting the Fenton home in cold weather and finding the house uncomfortably chilly. The Fentons were economizing on fuel and advised their visitors to sit near the common wall of the adjacent house in order to benefit from the neighbors' heat that managed to seep through the bricks.

Margaret's appearance and actions also caused some comment. She drove in a two-seated rock-away, a low, four-wheeled carriage with a top and open sides. It was a rather poor one and, unlike most carriages of that time, did not have mud guards on the wheels, so that when Margaret prepared to alight, she instructed the driver to get out first to hold newspapers over the wheels to protect her dress. This performance, combined with her odd-looking bonnet and the out-of-style clothes she always wore, invariably drew a staring crowd when she went out in her carriage.

For some time Margaret Pringle Fenton was afflicted with a back ailment that made stair-climbing difficult. Once, attending the opera with a niece, she reached her seat in the balcony by climbing backwards up the stairs. It was an attention-getting sight, but Margaret Fenton was apparently never bothered by stares and comments.

In spite of her oddities and her firm grasp on the purse strings, Margaret Fenton was evidently a kind and sensitive woman. Her brother Mulligan never married, and he had spent his life working in a clerical position in a bank. He had no wish to retire but, when in the judgment of his superiors the time had come, he was presented with the traditional gold watch and dismissed. With no work to fill his days and no family to comfort him, Mulligan's unhappy plight was not unique. Margaret's affectionate concern for her brother is said to have stimulated her interest in providing care for old men in their last years.

Mulligan died before 1876, the year in which his sister drew her Will. Margaret was determined to devote her small estate to rescuing others from the sad plight of her brother in his retirement years. Therefore, by that Will, Margaret Pringle Fenton provided that, following the death of her husband David and her brother Samuel, her fortune should be used "to establish and maintain a Home for respectable aged indigent men, and to be called 'The Pringle Memorial Home' in memory of my dear aged Father, Thomas Pringle." She also expressed a wish that preference be given to "educated and literary men."

Samuel W. Pringle was a bachelor who was devoted to his brother and sister. A tolerant and sympathetic man, he shared his sister's determination to help elderly men who, though well-educated, found themselves in reduced circumstances. By the time Samuel drew his Will in May of 1897, Margaret had died. After providing for David Fenton, Margaret's widower, Samuel left instructions for the establishment of the Pringle Memorial Home. Within another two years, Samuel had also died. In January of

1899, the desires of Margaret and Samuel were carried out in the incorporation of The Pringle Memorial Home.

Five men were appointed as directors of the Home. One of these men was Clarence M. Fenton of Buffalo, New York. He was David Fenton's nephew. It became Clarence Fenton's responsibility to find a building suitable for the Home. He located a large, solidly-built mansion on spacious grounds in Poughkeepsie, New York. The property, at 153 Academy Street, was acquired by the corporation and converted for use as a residence for fifteen elderly men. The Pringle Memorial Home had become a reality.

For some years the Home functioned well, as Margaret and Samuel had intended, providing a home and furnishing food, clothing, and care for its residents. However, the number of guests gradually declined. An annual report dated May 1, 1926, listed eight residents; two others had died during the year. By May 1, 1937, there were only two left. Because women generally outlive men and survive in greater numbers to require the kind of shelter offered by the Home, the directors realized that they could have easily filled the Home to capacity if their charter had allowed them to accept elderly women as well. But it had been the particular needs of the superannuated man alone in the world that Margaret and Samuel had anticipated.

When in 1957 only a single guest remained, the directors, who included Clarence Fenton's son, Gerald, made an effort to attract others to the Home by advertising its services and contacting local welfare organizations, but with no

effect. It had become apparent that the use of the institution would probably not increase. The directors, searching for a more feasible way of carrying out what Margaret and Samuel had wanted, reached a decision to sell the building, liquidate the assets of the Home, and place the resulting resources in the New York Community Trust for administration. The remaining guest was relocated in another institution, and the plan was carried out.

Today, the New York Community Trust gives continuing effect to the basic purposes for which the Pringle Memorial Home was originally established. The gold watch, or its contemporary equivalent, awarded at the end of a man's lifetime of work, no longer need signal the end of his dignity. Because of the foresight and loving concern expressed many years ago, the Thomas Pringle Memorials will go on helping in a variety of ways to bring assistance and comfort to the elderly, as Margaret and Samuel Pringle believed they justly deserved.



The New York Community Trust is a publicly supported community foundation which provides centralized management for many charitable funds. New York's major banks serve as trustees. Trustee for the Thomas Pringle Memorials is Chemical Bank.